

Grammar checker an annoyance

One way to avoid embarrassing mistakes in your writing is to let someone you trust check over your document.

Another way is to subject your prose to a computer grammar checker.

In theory, by using a computer instead of a human checker, no other person will ever know about the incomplete sentences or verb-subject agreement problems in your original draft.

Using a grammar checker, however, can be exasperating.

To subject your document to electronic scrutiny, you usually have to exit your word processor and invoke a separate program. Then you have to put up with lots of unnecessary criticism as these so-called expert systems offer too much advice.

A new program, Correct Grammar, claims to be "the most sophisticated grammar corrector ever devised for PC users." The program works only with WordPerfect, but offers the greatest integration that I've seen between a grammar checker and word pro-

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cessor. Nonetheless, it still leaves plenty to be desired. Here are some of Correct Grammar's features:

- It can be run in either "interactive" or "comment" mode. If you select interactive, the program will pause at each grammatical or style infraction and highlight the offending sentence parts. If the solution is simple you can request an automatic correction. If it's more involved or ambiguous, you must make manual edits.

Either way, Correct Grammar will inform you of the nature of the particular violation and give you the option of viewing an on-screen tutorial. If you disagree with any flaggings, you can, of course, just skip them.

In comment mode, Correct Grammar scours your document

from top to bottom and inserts WordPerfect-style comments to draw attention to potential problems. This may take a while so you might want to take a break while its mulling over your text. When its through, you have a document peppered with comment boxes which you have to go back and fix on your own. But since you'll then be making the corrections from within WordPerfect, you won't have the benefit of Correct Grammar's on-line tutorials.

- The program claims an extensive resource of grammar rules and business words. It "knows" 1,400 rules of grammar and understands the usage of 99 percent of American English business words. Correct Grammar has its own spelling checker with a vocabulary of over 125,000 words. It refers to and updates both its own and the WordPerfect supplemental dictionaries. Unlike WordPerfect, however, Correct Grammar gives you the option of enforcing capitalization rules.

- It allows customizing. If your writing preferences differ from

Correct Grammar's, you can disable various rules so you won't be bothered every time you begin a sentence with "and" or "but." Or you can adjust the tolerance of certain rules.

- The Bottom Line: While someone with shaky English skills might benefit from some of the grammar and style pointers offered by Correct Grammar, you still have to have enough confidence in your writing to know when it's making an unfounded suggestion. Since this happens often, you'd probably end up with more errors in your document than when you started. For this reason alone, I find it hard to recommend Correct Grammar for most business situations.

Correct Grammar costs \$99 and is published by Lifetree Software, 411 Pacific St., Monterey, Calif. 93940; (800) 543-3873.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.